The parish fraternities of County Meath in the late middle ages

COLM LENNON

In the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, dozens of religious fraternities of lay men and women were founded in the area of eastern Ireland, known as the Pale. In Meath alone, there were at least twenty of these associations established in towns and villages throughout the county proportionately the highest number in any part of the Englishry of late medieval Ireland.' The vogue among lay men and women for banding themselves together in religious associations was widespread throughout late medieval Europe. Fuelled essentially by a desire to have their souls remembered in perpetuity in order to escape the pains of Purgatory, the primary function of the fraternity was celebration of mass by specially-appointed chaplains.[2] The grim mortality of the Black Death in the mid-fourteenth century had borne in upon Christians everywhere ever more acutely their tenuous hold upon life, and in the decades that followed, the survivors engaged in benefaction of religious institutions on a large scale. Wealthier donors could afford to set up private chantries in their parish churches, perhaps bequeathing funds for extensions to the buildings containing designated altars, at which priests would chant or say mass on the anniversaries of family members.3 For the less affluent, these benefits could be gained by joining a parish fraternity and jointly investing through their parishes to ensure a centre of special worship, whether a side-altar or purpose-built chapel, and the employment of at least one chaplain to celebrate the sacred liturgies. Some chantries evolved into communal fraternities, and many fraternities became wealthy institutions through generations of testamentary bequests to the altar and chaplains.

This article examines the origins and purpose of the fraternities in Meath, and assesses their importance in the spiritual and social life of the community In essaying these tasks, it is worthwhile to study the impulses behind the setting up of fraternities, who the founders were and the pattern of their activities. It is of interest also to explore the question of the membership of these bodies, and the dynamic between laity and clergy within the fraternal system. The latter comprised the

chaplains who were employed by the brothers and sisters to sustain a regime of piety and prayer, mostly devoted to the remembrance of the souls of the dead in their liturgical rituals. A range of other social, charitable and educational functions were attached to the fraternities, helping them to foster a sense of community Included within the forms of fraternity were the colleges of clergy, normally founded by prominent aristocratic families in Meath and elsewhere, which became places of communal worship and congregation. By the time of the Reformation in the sixteenth century, the fraternities had been deeply rooted in many parishes for a hundred years or more, and it may be useful to investigate to what extent, if any, the progress of the religious reforms was impeded by the presence of these communal associations. Certainly many of them continued to function in the early seventeenth century, prompting speculation that the fraternities may have contributed at least minimally to the beginnings of the Counter-Reformation in the county and diocese.

It may be useful at the outset to consider a list of these lay religious foundations in Meath. Most of the major towns at the time, including Athboy, Trim and Kells, as well as southern Drogheda, are all represented as having centres of confraternal worship, normally located in chapels in parish churches.[4] The presence of a fraternity in Navan is uncertain, but there was a chapel of St Sunday in St Mary's, indicating at least some complexity in the parochial structure.[5] Fraternities also grew up in more rural parishes, mostly located in the eastern part of the county These included Stamullen, Ardcath, Ardmulchan, Balsoon, Duleek, Dunmoe, Greenogue or Grenok, Kilbery, Laracor, Moorechurch, Skryne, Piercetown Laundy, Dunshaughlin and Ratoath. There were at least three manorial churches under aristocratic patronage that fostered confraternal institutions, those of Dunsany and Killeen under Plunkett endowment, and that of Slane under the beneficence of the Flemings.[6] Two of these – Killeen and Slane – also came to incorporate colleges of clergy, which were more complex organisms. We know of all of these institutions mostly from their charters of foundation, from wills in which testators left gifts and property to their fraternities, and from references in diocesan records, such as the Armagh diocesan registers. It is not unlikely that there were other religious associations, perhaps of a more informal nature, that blossomed and faded without leaving any documentary or other mark on history

In Meath, the institutions under review exhibited varied patterns of development. Ardcath, Ardmulghan and Kilberry started out as simple chantries but had acquired the status of corporate or fraternal bodies by the late sixteenth century, according to references in later inquisitions.' Athboy, established as a chantry in 1417, was formally named a fraternity or guild in 1491,[8] and both it and Dunshaughlin were integrated with the civic communities in which they flourished.9 Dunshaughlin, Greenogue, Piercetown Laundy and Stamullen were formally set up by parliament as perpetual chantries in the fifteenth century.[10] In Kells, Ratoath, Trim and St Mary's, Drogheda, there were quite complex cantuarial systems based on two or three altars within the main parish churches.'' Fraternal activity at Balsoon, Duleek, Dunmoe, Laracor and Moorechurch is tenuously documented, but all had some form of chantry during the period.[12] In the case of the Duleek district, the presence of contiguous chantries in Ardcath and Greenogue, as well as the parish church of the town, all with interrelated endowments, may point to a multi-centred associational system.[13] Indeed, the chantries at Ardcath as well as Ardmulghan and Kilberry were referred to in later inquisitions as having had corporate status, again indicating that they were in fact fraternities.[14] At Skryne and Dunsany the gentry families patronised the growth of fraternal activity in their manorial churches.[15] Finally, Slane and Killeen were manorial ecclesiastical foci with elaborated forms of devotion, being at once family chantries, colleges of priests, and communal centres of worship and association.[16]

The moving spirit behind the associations, most of which dated to the second half of the fifteenth century, was described in the foundation charters as being 'the zeal of pious devotion', including the 'increase of divine service', and the 'fervour of charity' of the patrons who normally petitioned parliament or the crown for permission to proceed.[17] The purpose of the institutions was overtly obituarial, that is the saying of masses and prayers for the souls of the founders and their families and others. The erection of a chantry of one or more chaplains gave force to the intercessionary goal of the founding figures. Thereafter, depending on the nature of the foundation, various kinds of provision were made for the maintenance of the chaplains and the administration of the institution. In a couple of cases, ancillary objectives were set for the associations, such as 'to do other works of piety for the state and souls' in the case of Skryne, or 'to celebrate and perform other works of piety for the state' in the case of Dunsany,

though in both instances the nature of the work is not specified.[18] Among the other stated aims of the founders of fraternities were the desire to enhance the fabric of church buildings by providing altars and sometimes aisles: in Stamullen, a new chapel was constructed off the chancel of St Patrick's church, taking in some of the cemetery, by 1458.[19] In this way, the fraternity members participated collectively in the prestige that went with the establishment of a parochial institution.

The founders of the fraternities and chantries in Meath ranged from major aristocratic figures to men and women of humbler station, including artisans and small farmers. Apart from the earl of Kildare who was associated with the foundation of a fraternity at Athboy in 1491 ex *officio* (as lord deputy), many other leading nobles figure prominently as founding patrons including the barons of Skryne and Slane, and knights of the shire such as Christopher Plunkett and other members of their family at Dunsany, and Sir Robert Preston at Stamullen.[20] Some women's names appear in this aristocratic group, among them Alison Fitzgerald, Elizabeth Plunkett, Joan Cusack and Elizabeth Stuckle (or Stuckly).[21] The most substantial element in the coterie of confraternal founding figures is comprised of the class of wealthy gentlemen and women, including members of the Delahide, Barnewall, Cheever and Bermingham families, involved in setting up the chantry at Dunshaughlin, and those of the Scurlocks, Kerdiffs and Whites at Greenogue, for example.[22] Some chaplains are named among the founding members of fraternities, these being John Corell at Dunshaughlin, Robert Elize at Greenogue, George Whitehead and John White at Piercetown Laundy.[23] Interestingly there was a small group of laypeople who were connected to two foundations, including Philip Bermingham and John Cheever (to St Sythe's, Dublin, and Dunshaughlin), Robert Kerdiff (to Greenoge and Piercetown Laundy) and Barnaby Barnewall (to Dunshaughlin and Skryne).[24] In Piercetown Laundy and Greenogue, several burgesses or tenants are mentioned as associated with the foundations – Esmond Lounsby, Nicholas Dowding, Philip Lany, Thomas Laundey, Esmond Tankard, William Lawless and William Moody – while the Athboy chantry was established by the portreeve and commons of that time.[25]

The terms of the foundation charters of the fraternities provided for the setting up of corporations, headed by a master and two wardens, with a membership of lay men and women. It is likely that the residents of the towns and villages of Meath who were among the

founders of the fraternities became ordinary members, though we do not have membership rolls of brothers and sisters. All fraternities were to have a chantry, based at a designated altar, served by one or more chaplains who were to be appointed by the members. These priests could apparently be incorporated as members of the fraternities, as there are references to their being elected as masters and wardens. The collective membership of an association could be referred to, as in the instance of 'the present members of the confraternity of the altar of St Katherine' in the church of St Mary, Drogheda, who qualified for a plenary indulgence from Pope Martin V in 1428, but no individuals are named.[26] The charters of foundation allowed the institutions to receive income from rents and income, up to a maximum amount, to be expended principally on the stipends of the chaplains. These funds were derived from the accumulated donations of the members, mostly bequeathed in last wills and testaments, from which, along with deeds and leases, can be gleaned clues as to membership, and occasionally in deeds and leases of land or property

The level of donation to the physical establishment and upkeep of the fraternity chapels ranged from the splendid munificence of aristocratic founders to the small bequests of working parishioners. Families such as the Flemings of Slane were wealthy enough to build residences for the chantry priests attached to their institutions, while the Plunketts of Killeen and Dunsany extended their funding to the building of entire churches in which fraternity chapels were located.[27] Sir Christopher Plunkett of Dunsany provided in his will of 1463 for his burial before the altar of Our Lady in the church of Killeen which was the focus of confraternal devotion. To the church at Dunsany many valuable bequests were made, including cloths, furniture, money, a mill and lands to produce income for the maintenance of chantry priests to remember him in perpetuity In addition, Sir Christopher and his wife, Anne Fitzgarret, had left to the statue of Our Lady at the fraternity altar in Dunsany, a 'great red chaplet of pearls'. Plunkett also left to Dunsany several liturgical books, including antiphonaries, graduals, missals, psalters, a hymnal and a martyrology, and gowns to some priests. Gifts of less value but of equal significance to humbler donors were presented to the fraternities.[28] A set of bells was donated in 1419 for the chapels of St Catherine and St Patrick in St Mary's, Drogheda, by William and Agnes Symcock.[29] At the time of the closure of the shrines undertaken by Sir William Brabazon at the behest of King Henry VIII in 1539, jewels and ornaments worth 18s

and 19s respectively were found at the shrines of the Virgin in the Meath parish churches of Ardcath and Greenogue.[30]

All of the institutions' devotional activities were underwritten by a stock of real property that generated income for the payment of the chaplains' stipends and the maintenance of the fabric of the altar or chapel. In the centuries since the Anglo-Norman invasion a huge amount of land had become tied up in the ecclesiastical establishment, mostly in the appropriation of large estates to the use of the monasteries like Bective and Mellifont. The chantry and fraternal system attracted donations to its own growing land bank in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. With the associations entitled to draw in an income of between £10 and £50 per annum, gifts of land and houses were received and set out to rent. Typically the smaller institutions in Meath such as Ardcath and Kilbery might have accumulated lands extending to two or three dozen acres by the sixteenth century, while the medium-sized fraternities such as Dunmoe and Moorechurch farmed roo acres and more.[31] Urban bodies at Ratoath, Athboy and Kells had acquired town houses, as well as rural acres for the meeting of expenses.[32] The leading noble families of the county lavished a great deal of property on their foundations. Slane college, for example, received 150 acres beside the hill and elsewhere, and the rental of twenty houses to support the community of twelve clerical personnel.33 Killeen fraternity which was also a privately-funded college was even better endowed, with 1,000 acres donated by Sir Christopher Fleming and his wife, Joan Cusack, for the support of four clergy for the chantry.[34] Overall, the average income per fraternity or chantry altar, according to a valuation taken in 1540, was just under £5, the sum that seems to have equated to the average annual stipend of a chantry priest in the pre-Reformation period.[35]

Central to the 'fervour of devotion' that motivated the foundation of fraternities and chantries in late medieval Meath was the votive altar in the church or specially-built chapel at which mass was celebrated. Enhanced devotion to the eucharist and specifically Corpus Christi fuelled the drive towards the building of more and more sites for its celebration and the appointment of more and more chaplains to celebrate.[36] In the larger towns, multiple chapels were incorporated in the parish churches. St Mary's, Drogheda, had chapels dedicated to St Catherine, St Patrick and St Nicholas; St Columba's, Kells, to St Catherine, St Mary and Holy Rood; St Thomas's, Ratoath,

to St Mary, St Thomas and Holy Rood; and St Columba's, Trim, to St Catherine, St Laurence and St Patrick.[37] At Stamullen in 1458, a new chapel for a chantry of two chaplains, a clerk and four boys was erected outside St Patrick's parish church in the cemetery.[38] In some of the smaller places, the churches contained altars in the main nave, as in the cases St Katherine's altar in St Secundius, Dunshaughlin, and in Balsoon, and that of Holy Cross altar in Skryne.[39] Every church would have had a statue of the Blessed Virgin before which lights were perpetually lit, and this form of devotion could tie in with fraternal activity Of all of the dedications of fraternities and devotions that we know of, those to the Blessed Virgin Mary were by far the most popular, comprising 40% of all saintly patronages. A distant second was St Katherine, a saint whose cult was widespread in eastern Ireland, (with 14%), followed by Holy Cross or Rood, and St Nicholas. There were only two dedications to St Patrick, and only one to a local saint, St Shaghlyn, sharing the dedication with international saints such asJames, Thomas, Christopher, Laurence andJohn the Baptist.[40] The growing European cult of St Anne, the mother of the Blessed Virgin, is reflected in the foundation in her name of a fraternity in Athboy in 1491.

The fraternity's primary function was to provide masses in memory of the deceased benefactors or members. In order to reduce the temporal punishment for their lesser sins in Purgatory (or those of their family members and connections), Christians everywhere sought the assurance of prayers, most potently in the form of the mass, on the part of priests. Membership of fraternities and performance of certain sacred rituals could attract plenary indulgences, as in the case of that granted by Pope Martin V to the men and women of the confraternity of St Katherine in St Mary's, Drogheda, in 1428, while at Skryne, an indulgence of three years was granted in 1391 to those visiting and giving alms at the altar of the holy cross in St Columba's church.[41] It was the intention of the associations that 'all faithful Christians' be remembered in the ministry of the chaplains. An individual testator across the boundary in County Louth, Sir Christopher Dowdall provided in 1487 for a perpetual chaplain in St Nicholas's, Dundalk, to pray for 'his soul, and those of his ancestors and descendants, and all faithful departed'.[42] The funeral obsequies of a deceased brother or sister were solemn, and all aspired to buried in the fraternal space in the church. John Waringe wished to be interred in the chapel of St Sunday under a

great stone on the north side of the parish church of Navan in 1580.[43] Peter Lynch asked in 1553 to be buried 'for the image of the Blessed Virgin' in Laracor parish church.[44] Sir Christopher Plunkett's arrangements for his burial before the statue or altar of Our Lady in Killeen chapel were probably elaborate, as he willed that a portion of his household 'harness', or furniture, be set aside for funeral expenses.[45] The provision of candles by testators for their funeral masses was very common, and the commemoration of deceased members also extended beyond the funeral day requiem through the practice of votive masses, arranged for in wills. These extended regularly throughout the year until the first anniversary Besides being inscribed on the parish bede-roll for annual commemoration, the names of the dead were recorded for special remembrance by fraternity members through the chaplains' prayers on their anniversaries.[46]

Very few overt signs of the devotional milieu of the Meath fraternities remain. References to statues of the Blessed Virgin occur in the instances of St Mary's, Drogheda, where a light was maintained at the expense of William and Agnes Symcot who were members of the fraternity37 A shrine of Our Lady was the locus of intense devotion and donation in Dunsany, and Laracor also had an image of the Blessed Virgin.[48] The shrines, including that of St Mary of Trim, were dismantled by the commissioners appointed to close such places of pious resort in 1539-40, and the precious objects left as offerings either confiscated by them or repossessed by the donor families.[49] No surviving wall paintings or frescoes, such as the one found in St Anne's fraternity chapel in St Audoen's church, Dublin, appear to be extant in Meath.[50] Some furnishings such as baptismal fonts survive in churches that hosted fraternal life in the late middle ages, such as St Nicholas's, Dunsany, while the survival of wayside crosses may be tentatively linked to the presence of a number of fraternities dedicated in the name of the holy rood: one such connection has been suggested for St Mary's, Ardee (which had a fraternity of the holy cross) where a great decorated stone cross stands outside the west door of the church.[51] One other source for the depiction of aspects of corporate piety in stone are the tombs and funeral monuments of those closely associated with chantry and guild foundations. The carry-over of particular devotions into sculptural forms may be seen in the case of carvings of particular patron saints and the iconography of the passion of Christ, for example.[52]

The clerical class of chaplain was numerous and diverse in late medieval Anglo-Ireland. They were employed either as private domestic priests to serve manorial chapels, or else as chantry priests by fraternities, the functions of both sometimes appearing to overlap. The positions were poorly enough paid, the average stipend being about £6 per annum. The collegiate clergy of the Slane foundation received fairly low stipends, but their accommodation was provided for in the substantial residential building.[53] Most of the chaplains whom we know to have been appointed to fraternity posts in Meath were of English background, presumably born in the Pale. The names of chaplains correspond generally to those of local families in town and countryside, though in some cases connections are harder to make. In Athboy for example, the roll of chaplains' surnames included Hodane, O'Hallen (or O'Callan), Ingoll, Taylor, W. Godwyn and Goull.[54] At Greenogue, one Robert Elize was chaplain, and at Dunshaughlin, John Corell.[55] The foundations made under aristocratic patronage may have offered placements as chaplains for family members: Robert and Oliver Plunkett served as chaplains in the Killeen fraternity of that house.[56] The appointment of chaplains lay in the gift of the lay members of the fraternities, and in some cases in Meath, there was a link with the parochial and civic authorities. In Dunshaughlin, the chantry priests were selected by the proctors of the parish church and the 'greater part of the good men of the parish'.[57] The mayor of Drogheda may have had a role in choosing the chaplains of the fraternities in St Mary's parish, while at Athboy the chaplains celebrated mass for the portreeve and commons who may have a say in their election.[58]

The basic function of the chaplains who were attached to parish fraternities was to celebrate mass for the souls of benefactors and members in perpetuity A whole series of special provisions for masses occurs in the wills of laymen and women, all essentially centred on the institution of the altar in the church or the designated chapel. As well as fulfilling the obituarial duties which were their raison *d'etre*, the chaplains were assigned a range of duties in the devotional lives of the community They assisted the parish priests and curates in the administration of the sacraments such as baptisms and penance, and supplemented the choir at the celebration of the liturgy on Sundays and feastdays. As to their extra-ecclesial functions, there is little hard evidence, though the foundation charters of the chantries and fraternities do specify 'works of charity': the chaplain of Trim castle was also warden of the hospital of St Mary Magdalen.[59]

The fraternity and chantry chaplains performed a highly important role in liaising between the ecclesiastical and secular spheres in the Englishry of late medieval Ireland. Because of the endowments from which their stipends were paid, they inevitably found themselves bound up in relations with landowners who were the benefactors of the associations. There are very many documents extant in which lands are conveyed to chaplains in the form of quitclaims and perpetual deeds of trust.[60] These transactions were to circumvent the provisions of the statute of mortmain which forbade the transfer of land into church hands without special royal licence.[61] The process of suing for such a licence to alienate land for religious purposes was costly and time-consuming, and thus the chaplains became the focus of very many 'enfeoffments to use'. These were contracts which entitled the grantee-chaplains to enjoy the fruits of property during the lifetime of the grantor, who remained as trustee and owner of the property The interweaving of the secular and sacred spheres in this way was mutually advantageous to the parties concerned. To landowners, these donations to the parish fraternities ensured not just spiritual reward in the form of obituarial prayer but also the acquisition of the protective scaffolding of the church organization for their socio-economic standing. For the ecclesiastics, the legal intercourse with lay magnates not only boosted parochial finances and gave employment to priests but also enshrined the place of the parish with its lay associations within society

To underline the reciprocating nature of the fraternal system and the society of the late medieval Pale, it may be useful to focus on the collegiate establishments of the aristocracy in County Meath. Among the leading nobles of the Englishry, there was a vogue for the foundation of colleges of clergy, which gave assurance of spiritual benefits but also helped to body forth the prestige of the leading families. The Plunketts were notable in this respect with their college institution at Killeen. Founded originally about 1430, the fraternity and college were confirmed by Henry VII. The college housed at least four chaplains who served the fraternity altar of the Blessed Virgin in Killeen church. It was richly endowed by Christopher Plunkett and Joan Cusack with 1,000 acres to sustain the devotional round.[62] The latter was a generous benefactress of Christ Church, Dublin, having donated a golden image of the Blessed Virgin to the high altar on becoming a member of the confraternity of the cathedral.[63] The munificence of the Fleming family of Slane is marked by their

provision of a college of secular clergy with a residence near the hill of Slane about 1512. Up to twelve clerical personnel were to be accommodated, a lavish endowment of lands and properties being appropriated to their maintenance. The Flemings who also erected a house of the Third Order Regular of St Francis at Slane were anxious to commemorate their patronage by having proudly inscribed the family coat of arms on a wall of the collegiate residence.[64]

In the half-century or so before the Reformation, then, the nobility and gentry of the Meath area subscribed to the prevailing ethos of the colonial establishment suffusing the Pale and the lordship of Ireland. Sixty per cent of those institutions for which we have a year of foundation date from the period between the 1450s and the 1510s, a period during which the English community in Ireland were asserting their identity apart not just from those of Gaelic background but also those of English birth. Not only were they subscribing to the manifestation of civic and ethnic pride of the English of late medieval Ireland, but they were also underwriting the system of corporate Christianity which was then so popular. In the case of the more affluent aristocrats this impulse found expression in the foundation of collegiate bodies, employing multiple clergy, and embracing the rest of the parochial communities through their fraternal presence. The gentlefolk of the county the merchant patricians of the towns and the less privileged orders in town and countryside shared in the communal associations centred on the parish churches, through their participation in the rituals, their employment of chaplains to celebrate masses for their souls and those of their loved ones, and their bequeathing in their wills of donations, large and small to the property owned by the fraternities. The activity of the fraternities not just in the domain of the sacred but also in the quotidian secular intercourse of the parishioner-members helped to consolidate the bonds of community with that colonial milieu. For the parish associations provided opportunities for feasting and socializing, the dispensing of charity and the performance of civic rituals and pageants that reinforced familial and other ties.

When the Reformation got under way in Ireland in the 1530s and 1540s, it might have been expected that the whole panoply of late medieval corporate religion, including the fraternities and chantries, would be swept away, as happened in contemporary England.[65] This did not happen, however, as either through administrative neglect or deliberate omission, the state authorities failed to initiate legislation

to dissolve the religious fraternities in Ireland. Thus, many of the pre-Reformation associations continued to function in the parishes in Meath and elsewhere. In Drogheda, the fraternal system, which included St Mary's in Meath, continued to flourish into the seventeenth century, and also individual bodies survived at Duleek, Ardmulchan, Killeen, Greenogue and Ardcath.[66]

That personal piety centred on the chantry chapels and altars persisted is evident from a number of requests by testators for burial in these traditional, hallowed places. Peter Lynch asked in 1553 (at the time of Edward VI's Protestant Reformation) to be interred 'before the image of the blessed virgin in my parish church of Lethercor' or Laracor.[67] In his will of 1591, Thomas Elliott of Balreask remembered the statue of Blessed Katherine in Balsoon church, and eleven years earlier, in 1580, John Waringe had requested that he buried under the great stone in the north side of the church of Navan.[68] With the strong links between parishioners and their chantry priests and altars, it is not perhaps surprising that there was no great move on the part of the authorities to suppress the fraternities during the sixteenth century These bonds had been formalized in some cases, such as Athboy, where the portreeve and commons of the town were the founders, Dunshaughlin, whose chaplains, it was stipulated, were to be selected by the proctors of the church and the 'greater part of the good men of the parish', and Greenogue, where twelve parishioners, as well as the bishop of Meath, appointed the chaplains.[69] Any precipitate official assault on the fraternal system in Meath risked an unravelling of delicately woven communal bonds.

By the early seventeenth century, the recusant population of Meath who comprised the majority of the population had ceded the parish churches to the Anglicans, abandoning chantry and fraternity chapels in the process. But the property of the fraternities remained in lay Roman Catholic hands, as discovered by Bishop James Ussher during his visitation of his Meath diocese in 1622. In the case of the great collegiate establishments at Slane and Killeen, for example, the aristocratic patrons – the Flemings and the Plunketts – merely resumed possession their ancestors' endowments. In the latter case, James Plunkett, the baron of Killeen, Patrick Plunkett, lord of Dunsany, Richard Plunkett of Rathmore and Oliver Plunkett of Balrath had all served as officers of the guild of the Blessed Virgin at the end of the sixteenth century.[70] In 1609, James Plunkett of Killeen received a grant from James I of all the lands and buildings associated

with the college.[71] Lands of the Duleek and Greenogue associations were bestowed on the earl of Kildare in the same year.[72] In some cases, it was noted that the charters originally granted to the fraternities or chantries had constituted them as corporations and therefore there was a legal barrier to their suppression. This was the case in Ardmulchan and Ardcath, for example, which continued on into the 1610s at least.[73] As elsewhere in communities where recusancy was strongly embedded, there is a strong suspicion that income derived from fraternal lands and property in Meath was being channelled into the system of maintenance of Roman Catholic priests of the tridentine mission. The Nugents of Delvin were certainly protective of Catholic clergy, using their extensive system of ecclesiastical patronage for that purpose.[74] Taken together with the income derived by lay patrons from the impropriated church livings in the parishes, it is likely that the fraternal income contributed to the nascent Counter-Reformation in Meath.[75]

It has recently been shown by Dr Clodagh Tait that Roman Catholic testators found alternative means of ensuring the health of their souls in the seventeenth century, now that the route of donation to the parish fraternities was effectively blocked. Many used circumspect and opaque formulae in their wills to disguise the nature of their bequests to priests to celebrate mass for their souls.[76] While donations for the repair of the naves of parish churches, such as Piercetown Laundy, continued to be made into the 1570s, the destination of bequests changed thereafter.[77] Provision was frequently made for almshouses and small hospitals, some of which were almost certainly fronts for fraternity-style institutions to house priests, as well as to dispense charity But bequests to individual priests continued to be made: Peter Lynch's will, which requested his burial in Laracor church before the image of the Blessed Virgin, also charged his wife with finding 'a priest upon my goods and leases, during her life to pray for her and me, and our posterity and all Christian souls'.[78] In 1637, Anthony Skelton of County Meath, left 'one grey nag and the life of the saints' to his 'gostly father', evidently a favoured chaplain and priest.[79] Such bequests continued the practice of commemorative soul masses, though perhaps now separated from older parochial institutions.

A newer type of confraternity or sodality did begin to take root in the seventeenth century under the auspices of the Tridentine reform, sponsored by the religious and secular priests of the Counter-

Reformation. Although they went on to gain popularity among the laity, they were markedly different from their late medieval predecessors. The crucial characteristic of the latter was that they were run by lay men and women. By contrast, the Counter-Reformation confraternities were very much under the control of the clergy, particularly the religious orders. This intensive lay involvement was,significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it had accustomed the brothers and sisters to engagement in church matters, including office-holding as masters and wardens of the fraternities, and selection of priest-chaplains. Service of the fraternities carried over into the administration of the parish, the offices in both often being interchangeable, as at Skryne, for example, where proctors of the fraternity may have been church wardens of the parish.[80] By the time of the early Reformation, then, the laity were experienced in the running of parishes and exercised considerable influence in the determining of the fate of the religious reforms. And as Catholic clerical leadership languished in the transitional phase before the Counter-Reformation became firmly established, lay folk, with their patronage of parochial and fraternal resources, played a notable leadership role in ensuring continuity between the old and new regimes in religious practice. Finally, the bonds of membership of the parish associations, reinforcing those of actual kinship, facilitated the creation of community, especially among the residents of Meath whose background as a colonial population may have raised questions of social and political identity The spirit of self-reliance as exhibited in the formation and running of parish fraternities reflected and indeed heightened the sense of belonging to a proud and defined ethnic group, whose experience of ritual kinship, while shared with their fellow-Christians elsewhere, was uniquely theirs as parishioners, countyfolk and Palespeople.

References

1 For the background, see Colm Lennon, 'The fraternities and cultural duality in late medieval Ireland, 1450-1550' in Christopher Black and Pamela Gravestock (ed.), *Early modern confraternities in Europe and the Americas: international and interdisciplinary perspectives* (Aldershot, 2006), pp 35-52. The research upon which this paper is based has been facilitated by the award of a Senior Research Fellowship in 2002-2003 by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences.

2 See, for example, Virginia R. Bainbridge, *Gilds in the medieval countryside: social and religious change in Cambridgeshire, c. 1350-1558* (Woodbridge, 1996); Ken Farnhill, *Guilds and the parish community in late medieval East Anglia, c. 1470-1550* (York, 2001).

3 K.L. Wood-Legh, 'Some aspects of the history of chantries in the late middle ages' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xxviii (1946), pp 47-60.

4 The main sources for the parish fraternities in Meath are Anthony Cogan, The diocese of Meath: ancient and modern, 3 vols (Dublin, 1862-70); Olive C. Curran (ed.), History of the diocese of Meath *1860-1993*, 3 vols (Mullingar, 1995).

5 Margaret C. Griffiths (ed.), Calendar of inquisitions of the exchequer: County Dublin (Dublin, 1991), p. 259.

6 For Dunsany, see Calendar of Carew *Manuscripts*, v, p. 359; Statute rolls, Edward IV, i, pp 323-31; Curran, Meath, p. 1061; for Killeen, see Cogan, Meath, i, pp 354-6; Curran, Meath, pp 1061-2; and for Slane see Cogan, Meath, i, p. 286; Curran, Meath, p. 1041; Griffiths (ed.), Calendar of inquisitions, pp 241-3.

7 Cogan, Meath, i, pp 333-4, 340-1, 349; Curran, Meath, p. 1054

8 Cogan, Meath, i, p. 348; Curran, Meath, p. 1059; Gearóid MacNiocaill (ed.), Crown surveys of *lands, 1540-1541*, with the *Kildare* rental begun in *1518* (Dublin, 1992), p. 106; D.B. Quinn (ed.), 'The bills and statutes of the Irish parliaments of Henry VII and Henry VIII' in *Analecta Hibernica*, x (1941), pp 86-7.

9 Statute rolls, Edward IV, i, pp 456-61.

10 Statute rolls, Henry VI, p. 513; Statute rolls, Edward *IV*, i, pp 327, 455-61; ii, p. 577-81.

11 Cogan, Meath, i, pp 348-9, 363; Aubrey Gwynn and R. Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses*: Ireland (Harlow, 1970), p. 361; John Bradley, The topography and layout of medieval Drogheak (Drogheda, 1997), p. 14.

12 Curran, Meath, pp 1029, 1063, 1095; Cogan, Meath, i, p. 334; Griffiths (ed.), Calendar of inquisitions, p. 361.

13 Cogan, Meath, i, p. 334.

14 Ibid., i, pp 333-4, 340-1, 349.

15 Ibid., i, p. 286; Griffiths (ed.), Calendar of inquisitions, pp. 241-3; Calendar of Carew Manuscripts, v, pp 357-9.

16 Cogan, Meath, i, pp 286, 354-6; Curran, Meath, pp 1041, 1061-2; Griffiths (ed.), Calendar of inquisitions, pp 241-3.

17 See, for example, Statute rolls, Edward IV, ii, p. 768.

18 Statute rolls, *Edward IV*, i, pp 323-31; ii, p. 233.

19 Statute rolls, Henry VI, p. 513.

20 Quinn (ed.), 'Bills and statutes of Henry VII and Henry VIII', pp 86-7; Statute rolls, Edward IV, ii, p. 233; Griffiths (ed.), *Calendar of inquisitions*, pp 241-3; *Statute* rolls, Henry *VI*, p. 513.

21 Griffiths (ed.), Calendar of inquisitions, pp 241-3; Quinn (ed.), 'Bills and statutes of Henry VII and Henry VIII', pp 86-7; Statute rolls, Edward *IV*, i, pp 323-31; Marian Lyons, 'Lay female piety in late medieval Ireland' in Brendan Bradshaw and Dáire Keogh (ed.), Christianity in Ireland revisiting the story (Dublin, 2002), p. 67.

22 Statute *rolls*, Edward IV, i, pp 456-61; ii, 577-81.

23 Statute rolls, Edward IV, i, pp 456-61; ii, 327, 577-81.

24 Statute rolls, Edward IV, i, pp 456-61; ii, 233, 327, 577-81; Colm Lennon (ed.), 'The foundation charter of St Sythe's guild, Dublin, 1476' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, xlviii (1994), pp 3-12.

25 Statute rolls, Edward IV, ii, 327, 577-81; Quinn (ed.), 'Bills and statutes of Henry VII and Henry VIII', pp 86-7.

26 Curran, Meath, p. 1212; *Calendar of papal letters*, viii, p. 39.

27 Griffiths (ed.), Calendar of *inquisitions*, pp 241-3; Cogan, Meath, i, pp 354-6; *Cal.* Carew MSS, v, pp 357-9.

28 *Cal.* Carew MSS, v, pp 357-9.

29 John D'Alton, The history of Drogheak with its environs (2 vols, Dublin, 1844), i, 42.

30 Curran, Meath, pp 1054, 1066.

31 Curran, Meath, pp 1029, 1054, 1066, 1095; Cogan, Meath, i, pp 333-4, 349.

32 Gwynn and Hadcock (ed.), *Medieval religious houses*, p. 361; Curran, Meath, p. 1059; Cogan, Meath, i, pp 348-9.

33 Griffiths (ed.), *Calendar* of inquisitions, p. 243.
34 Curran, Meath, pp 1061-2; Cogan, Meath, i, p. 360.
35 *Valor beneficiorum* ecclesiasticorumin *Hibernia* (Dublin, 1741), p. 2.
36 See Miri Rubin, *Corpus* Christi: the *eucharist* in late medievalculture (Cambridge, 1991).
37 Bradley, Drogheda, p. 14; Cogan, Meath, i, pp 259, 348-9, 363.
38 Statute rolls, Henry VZ, p. 513.
39 Statute rolls, Edward *IV*, i, pp 186-7; J.G. Smyly (ed.), 'Old Latin deeds in the library of Trinity College' in *Hermathena*, lxx (1947), p. 17; Curran, Meath, p. 1037.
40 This information is drawn from a list of dedications of almost two dozen Meath fraternity foundations, including their chantry chapels.
41 Curran, Meath, pp 1037, 1212; *Calendar of papal letters*, viii, p. 39;
42 Charles McNeill and AJ. Otway-Ruthven (ed.), *Dowdall deeds* (Dublin, 1960), p. 206.
43 Griffiths (ed.), *Calendar* of inquisitions, p. 252.
44 Clodagh Tait, Death, burial and commemoration in Ireland, *1550-1650* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp 145-6.
45 Curran, Meath, p. 1062.
46 See Colm Lennon, 'The Book of Obits of Christ Church cathedral, Dublin' in Raymond Gillespie and Raymond Refausse (ed.), The medieval *manuscripts* of *Christ* Church cathedral, Dublin (Dublin, 2006), pp 163-82, for a discussion of these commemorative practices.
47 D'Alton, History of Drogheda with its environs, i, 42.
48 T.J. Westropp, 'The churches of Dunsany and Skreen, County Meath' in Royal Society of Antiquaries of *Ireland Journal [hereafter* R.S.A.*I.Jn.]*, xxiv (1894), pp 222-3; Tait, Death, *burial* and commemoration in Ireland, p. 145.
49 Cf. Charles McNeill (ed.), 'Accounts of sums realized by sale of chattels of some suppressed Irish monasteries' in *R.S.A.I. Jn.*, lii (1922), pp 11-37.
50 John Crawford, Within the walls: the story *of* St *Audoen's* church, Cornmarket, Dublin (Dublin, 1986), pp 23, 24.
51 H.A. Jefferies, Priests and prelates of Armagh in the age of *Reformations, 1518-1558* (Dublin, 1997), p. 25.
52 Cf. Paul Cockerham and Amy Louise Harris, 'Kilkenny funeral monuments, 1500-1600: a statistical and analytical account' in Proceedings of the Royal *Irish* Academy, v, section C (2001), pp 135-88.
53 T.J. Westropp, 'Slane in Bregia, County Meath: its friary and hermitage' in *R.S.A.I.Jn.*, xxx (1901), pp 409-30.
54 Curran, Meath, p. 1059; Cogan, *Meath*, i, p. 348; British Library, Egerton MSS, charter 102; HJ. Lawlor (ed.), 'A calendar of the register of Archbishop Fleming' in Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy xxx, section C (1912), p. 120.
55 Statute rolls, Edward IV, i, pp 455-61; ii, pp 577-81.
56 Cogan, Meath, i, p. 376.
57 Statute rolls, Edward IV, i, pp 455-61.
58 D'Alton, *Hiistory* of Drogheda with its environs, i, 42; Cogan, Meath, i, p. 348.
59 Curran, Meath, p. 1044;
60 See L.P. Murray, 'The ancient chantries of County Louth' in *Journal* of the County Louth ArchaeologicalSociety, ix (1939), pp 181-208.
61 Paul Brand, Paul, 'King, church and property: the enforcement of restrictions on alienations into mortmain in the lordship of Ireland in the late middle ages', Peritia, iii (1984), pp 481-502.
62 Curran, Meath, pp 1061-2, 1095; Cogan, Meath, i, pp 354-6.
63 Raymond Refaussé with Colm Lennon (ed.), The *registers* of Christ Church cathedral, Dublin (Dublin, 1998), p. 48.
64 Westropp, 'Slane in Bregia', pp 409-30.

65 Cf Alan Kreider, *English chantries: the road to dissolution* (Harvard, 1979).
66 Cf. Patrick Little, 'Discord in Drogheda: a window on Irish church-state relations in the 1640s' in *Historical Research*, lxxv (2002), pp 355-62; Cogan, *Meath*, i, pp 333-4, 340, 356.
67 Tait, *Death, burial and commemoration in Ireland*, p. 145
68 Curran, *Meath*, p. 1063; Griffiths (ed.), *Calendar of inquisitions*, p. 252.
69 Curran, *Meath*, p. 1059; *Statute rolls, Edward IV*, i, pp 455-61; ii, pp 577-81.
70 Cogan, *Meath*, i, pp 256,356.
71 Ibid., i, p. 356.
72 Xbid., i, p. 334.
73 Ibid., i, p. 333,340.
74 See Colm Lennon, 'The Nugent family and the diocese of Kilmore in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries' in *Breifne*, ix (2001), pp 360-74.
75 For a recent survey of the impact of the Reformation in Meath, see Brendan Scott, *Religion and Reformation in the Tudor diocese of Meath* (Dublin, 2006).
76 Clodagh Tait, '"As legacie upon my soul": the wills of the Irish Catholic community, c. 1550-c. 1660' in Robert Armstrong and Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin (ed.), *Community in early modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2006), pp 179-98.
77 Ibid., p. 188.
78 Tait, *Death, burial and commemoration in Ireland*, pp 145-6.
79 Tait, '"As legacie upon my soul"', p. 196.
80 MacNiocaill (ed.), *Crown surveys of lands, 1540-1*, p. 105.